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ABSTRACT

The federally funded project is intended to aid inservice training specific to the skills and needs of severely handicapped children and youth. Project goals include: development, implementation, and evaluation of training procedures and materials to change the attitude and knowledge of persons responsible for the education of learners with severe handicaps; and development, implementation, demonstration and evaluation of inservice training methods, procedures and planning systems of transitions for severely handicapped and deaf blind learners. Three model outreach sites in Mississippi serve as demonstration and dissemination sites. Major expected project outcomes include: (1) the acquisition/improvement of teacher effectiveness and implementation of quality educational services for severely handicapped learners; (2) the acquisition/improvement of teacher effectiveness for this population; (3) demonstration that the learners gained in functional skills as a result of project activities. (DB)

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MISSISSIPPI UNIVERSITY AFFILIATED PROGRAM FOR PERSONS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

PLANNING SYSTEMS OF TRANSITIONS TO THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR PERSONS SERVING LEARNERS WITH SEVERE HANDICAPS

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ABSTRACT

The Mississippi University Affiliated Program (UAP) in collaboration with the Department of Special Education at the University of Southern Mississippi and the Mississippi Children's Rehabilitation Center received federal funding through the U.S. Department of Education to address the needs of service providers in delivering inservice training specific to the skills and needs of children and youth with severe handicaps. Four levels of inservice training have been identified and are currently provided: awareness, change in knowledge, change in skill and implementation, and replication of inservice training components. Data are presented in another section of this overview for the project's awareness training activities.

The major goals of the project include: (1) the development, implementation and evaluation of training procedures and materials to change the attitude and knowledge of persons responsible for the education of learners with severe handicaps, and (2) the development, implementation, demonstration and evaluation of inservice training methods, procedures and planning systems of transitions for learners with severe handicaps and deaf-blindness. These broad goals seek to increase trainee competencies and implementation of innovative practices that result in functional life skills and interactions within the least restrictive school and community environments for learners with severe handicaps.

Three model outreach sites were selected to participate; one each from the northern, central and southern parts of the state. These sites will serve as demonstration and dissemination sites for state wide staff development upon completion of the project. The overall model design includes the interface of primary learner outcomes (individualization, participation, productivity, and independence) with service provider variables (teaching strategies, learning time, environmental arrangement and climate, and intervention methods and strategies) across educational, work, homeliving, and community environments.

The major expected outcomes of the project include (1) the change of attitudes and expectations of functional life skills for learners with severe handicaps, (2) the acquisition/ improvement of teacher effectiveness and implementation of quality educational services that lead toward productivity and independence of learners with severe handicaps and deaf-blindness in the least restrictive school and community environments, and (3) the demonstration that the learners gain in functional skills as a result of project activities.

INSERVICE TRAINING MODEL

Premise

Most inservice models operate under the assumption that if a series of changes are made in the trainee's attitudes, knowledge, skill or motivation the trainees will make the desired impact; that is learner outcomes will be appropriate (Bricker & Filler, 1983). There is little evidence to support effective change when only individual concerns are addressed. The change process is complex and related not only to the individual variables but also learner outcomes and other ecological concerns.

This inservice model is based on the premise that effective inservice must reflect interaction between and among participant variables, learner variables, and organizational variables. See Figure 1 for an outline of the inservice training model.

Purpose

This project, through its four levels of implementation, seeks to accomplish two major goals. The first goal includes the development, implementation and evaluation of processes and procedures that are based on innovative practices for the education of learners with severe handicaps in the least restrictive environment. The anticipated outcome is to change the attitudes, knowledge and skills of persons providing services to these learners. The second goal includes the development, implementation, demonstration and evaluation of inservice training methods and procedures. The desired outcome is a flexible and locally responsive outreach model. This model seeks to provide a documented replicable framwork for inservice delivery.

Process

Sarason (1971) suggests that one problem effecting change is that change agents fail to consider information about the uniqueness of the school culture they seek to influence. It is typical for a university team or outside consultant to begin an inservice with preconceived ideas about the "problem" and how it "should" be corrected. We know, however, that inservice effectiveness is improved when the participants are involved in the original planning (Corrigan & Howey, 1980). In addition, inservice training is more effective when the process involves all those effected by the change, this includes not only direct service providers but also administrators at all levels.

The inservice delivery process of this project is an outreach model that utilizes local input during the initial planning stages, on-site training based on participant perceptions of strengths and needs, and involves learners from participant's classrooms. See Figure 2 for more detail on steps within each level and type of evaluation.

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FIGURE 1: Inservice training rationale and plan of action

PREMISE

- o Service Provider variables assessed (teaching strategies, learning time, environmental arrangements, systematic instructional methods and procedures)
- o Learner outcome measures of individualization, participation, productivity and independence addressed
- o Community, work, and homelife skills transitions are planned within and between environments
- o Perspectives of the teachers, principals, and the organization and commitment of the schools are considered

PURPOSE

- o Increase positive attitude and expectations
- o Increase service provider knowledge and skills
- o Increase implementation of "best practices"
- o Increase learner's functional skills
- o Increase placement in least restrictive school and community and environments
- o Decrease institutional placement (specifically targeting learners with deaf-blindness and increasing service options in LRE)

PROCESS

- o Selection of sites across regions within the state
- o Four levels of inservice training
- o Local school district input in planning; based on needs
- o On-site intensive training
- o Follow-up assistance in implementing best practices
- o Local districts continue training for cost effectiveness

PRODUCT

Change in Awareness Attitude Expectations	Change in Knowledge	Change in Skills - Demonstration of Competencies	Implementation of skills - Durability, Generalization of trainee skills	Positive change in age-appropriate functional learner skills	Continuation of Inservice Training to additional sites
LEVEL I	LEVEL II	LEVEL III			LEVEL IV

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FIGURE 2: Inservice model process and evaluation

Level	Process	Evaluation
I. Awareness	o General Public Awareness - Brochure, newsletters, public media o Mediated Awareness Presentations o Model Site Administrator Awareness Presentations	o Number of Requests for Awareness Presentations ● Pre/Posttest Opinionnaire o Satisfaction Scale
II. Knowledge	o Assessment of Need o District/Project Consensus of Scale and Direction o Technical Assistance Contracts/ Model Site Workplans o On-site Inservice Presentations o Technical Assistance to Non-Model Sites	o Pre/Post Needs Assessment o Discrepancy Evaluation o Pre/Posttest of Knowledge o Satisfaction Scale o Concerns Questionnaire
III. Skill and Implementation	o Assessment of Need o Site/Project Consensus of Workplans o Baseline Data Collection o One-Week Intensive On-Site Inservice o Follow-up	o Pre/Post Needs Assessment o Discrepancy Evaluation o Multiobservational Classroom Code o UPAS (Learner Change) o Level of Implementation o Satisfaction Scale o Concerns Questionnaire
IV. Replication	o Staff Development within District o Outreach Teachers o 3rd Year Institute	o Number of services obtained/ provided o Satisfaction Scale o Concerns Questionnaire

● Findings reported on next page.

Findings

The following findings are reported in reference to the Awareness Level of the Inservice Model:

Participants:

33	administrators
262	teachers
40	assistants
25	support professionals
19	other
399	total

Design: PRE/POSTTEST QUESTIONNAIRE

Procedure:

1) districts request awareness presentation
2) 1 hour awareness presentation
   a) pretest opinionnaire--20 item 4 point Likert Scale
   b) slide presentation highlighting current federal policy and "best practices" for educating learners with severe handicaps
   c) overview of project activities and services
   d) question/answer
   e) posttest opinionnaire--20 item 4 point Likert Scale

Discussion

1) Item by item t-test results show significant positive ($p < .05$) change on 18 of the 20 items on pre/posttest data, mean difference ranged from .02 - .44.
2) The t-test comparisons of pre/posttest results across participant groups yielded a significant positive change when the posttest results of the teachers and assistants were compared ($p < .05$). Whereas there was no significant differences in the pretest scores, the teachers had significantly higher posttest scores.
3) Data showed teachers' attitudes were high on both the pre and posttest, which resulted in very little movement. However, on-site observations revealed little implementation of "best practices" in the classrooms of the 10 programs applying for model site status. This may suggest that assessing the attitudes of service providers provides little insight into actual classroom practices.
4) The assessment of service provider concerns regarding how change will affect their program may be a better indication of actual practices. Current efforts are, therefore, concentrating on measuring service provider concerns across time (Hall, George & Rutherford, 1986).

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